

PHIL 3923H: Honors Colloquium on Free Will
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Fischer and Ravizza, Chapter 4

I. & II.

- This chapter turns to the topic of moral responsibility for the consequences of one's actions. Examples: the *Exxon Valdez*, the mayor's death, and the missile attack on Washington D.C.

- As with actions, one can be morally responsible for the consequences of one's actions even if there were no alternative possibilities to those consequences.

- But there also seem to be situations in which an agent is not morally responsible for some consequence, *because* she was not able to prevent it from occurring. This makes things somewhat puzzling.

- Examples: Train and Missile stories, pp. 93–95.

III. & IV.

- One way of attempting to solve this puzzle is to distinguish between universals and particulars. One can then argue that there are no cases in which a person is morally responsible for a consequence, considered as either a particular or universal, which lacks alternative possibilities. (96–98) This is van Inwagen's ("divide and conquer") strategy, which we encountered earlier.

- So, with respect to Frankfurt-style cases, van Inwagen argues that there are alternative possibilities to the consequence-particulars. But, F&R object:

Thus the proponent of Divide and Conquer seems to be confusing power to do otherwise (in the relevant sense) with the *mere possibility of something different occurring*. (99)

Instead, F&R offer the following account:

... an agent *S* has guidance control of a consequence-particular *C* just in case *S* had guidance control of some act *A* (i.e., *A* results from the agent's own, moderately reasons-responsive mechanism), and it is reasonable to expect *S* to believe that *C* will (or may) result from *A*. (101)

- F&R also note that Sam, in their example, does have guidance control over the consequence-universal. So, he can be held morally responsible for it.

V. & VI.

- Heinaman's account:

On Heinaman's approach, an agent is morally responsible for a state of affairs insofar as he knowingly and intentionally does something, the doing of which at least in part explains why the state of affairs obtains. (104)

- F&R's objection to Heinaman:

Heinaman's criterion now faces the following problem. In "Train", Ralph should not be deemed morally responsible for the state of affairs, *that the train ends up in Syracuse*. But we do not see how Heinaman can deny that Ralph's act of turning the train onto a particular track toward Syracuse at least in part explains why the train ends up in Syracuse (in some way or another). Certainly, it is as plausible to say this as to suppose that in "Assassin" Sam's act of pulling the trigger at least in part explain why the state of affairs, *that the mayor is killed (in some way or another)*, obtains. (105)

Q: Does Ralph's behavior really explain this? Is this just as plausible as the conclusion in the "Assassin" case?

VII.

- F&R insist that only guidance control, and not regulative control, is needed for moral responsibility for consequence-universals. Their account:

... we shall say that the agent displays guidance control of a consequence insofar as the consequence emanates from a responsive *sequence* ... We shall say that, in order for the sequence leading to a consequence to be responsive, *both* the mechanism leading to the bodily movement must be moderately reasons-responsive *and* the process leading from the bodily movement to the event in the external world must be "sensitive to action". (107)

- There are Frankfurt-style cases dealing with the consequences of our actions (the second stage), rather than our actions themselves. See "Case C"

on pp. 108–109.

◦ triggering event: “. . . an event which is such that, if it were to occur, it would *initiate* a causal sequence leading to C.” (110–111) Triggering events are to be contrasted with *background conditions*.

◦ They then offer an account of the sensitivity of the outer path in terms of triggering events:

Further, the outer path leading from the bodily movement to the event in the external world must be sensitive to the bodily movement in roughly the following sense: if the actual type of process were to occur and all triggering events that do not actually occur were *not* to occur, then a different bodily movement would result in a different upshot (i.e., the obtaining of a different consequence-universal). (112)

A more technical presentation of this account is given later on p. 112.

VIII.

• In this section they run through the various examples again and illustrate that their account renders the correct account of moral responsibility for each.

IX. & X.

[Let’s ignore this material.]